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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#)  
SUBJECT: MUSTAFA BARGHOUTHI ON GOVERNMENT FORMATION

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During a February 14 meeting in Ramallah with the Consul General, Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)-elect member Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi denied reports emanating from Hamas sources that he or other individuals from his faction, "Independent Palestine", were engaged in negotiations over their possible inclusion in a Hamas-led government. Barghouthi suggested that Hamas was nonetheless determined to include Fatah and other factions in its cabinet, adding that he would consider joining if certain conditions were met. He cautioned that a strategy by Israel or the international community aimed at undermining a Hamas-led government could backfire, inflame the Palestinian public, and actually undercut Fatah's prospects in any follow-on elections. On the January 25 elections, Barghouthi said that he had anticipated a stronger result for his faction, but that intense polarization toward Hamas and Fatah among Palestinians in the final days led to more modest results for "Independent Palestine" and Salam Fayyad's "Third Way". End summary.

Barghouthi Denies  
Talking to Hamas  
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12. (C) PLC-elect member Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi February 14 denied that he or other individuals associated with his party, "Independent Palestine", were engaged in negotiations with Hamas over their possible inclusion in the next Palestinian cabinet. Barghouthi described Hamas statements to the media in this regard as "inaccurate and confusing."

13. (C) Barghouthi expected that Hamas would seek to conclude the government formation process within the three weeks provided under the Basic Law. He suggested that Hamas would initially seek to form an alliance with Fatah, and that Fatah's Old Guard leadership might consider joining a government if it could ensure its hold on power. Hamas may balk at the inclusion of the Fatah Old Guard, however, since it had based its election campaign on the elimination of the corruption brought about by the old regime. Barghouthi indicated that his faction, "Independent Palestine", might consider joining a National Unity Government if the government platform advocated a clear political and social agenda suitable to Barghouthi's faction. Barghouthi added that his faction's position had thus far been to remain independent of Fatah and Hamas. (Comment: Barghouthi's penchant for political opportunism increases the likelihood that he would jump at the chance to take a prominent role in the next cabinet. End comment.) If a unity government with Fatah couldn't be agreed on, Barghouthi thought Hamas would try to form a technocratic government, but one that was under its control.

14. (C) Barghouthi acknowledged that Abu Mazen would face a tough road ahead with a Hamas-led government. It was therefore incumbent on Abu Mazen to elevate the influence and stature of the PLO as much as possible and simultaneously incorporate as many Palestinian factions as possible within its governing structures. Despite the challenges ahead, Barghouthi said that Abu Mazen had shown greater determination and decisiveness in recent weeks, and noted that Abu Mazen would need to consolidate his authority in the shortest time possible.

Barghouthi: "Don't Count  
on Hamas Failure"  
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15. (C) Barghouthi said that some elements in Fatah were advocating a strategy of isolating Hamas once the next government is formed, in the belief that it would quickly fail and Abu Mazen would then call for new legislative elections. He labeled this strategy "dangerous," because it would not ensure a Fatah victory. The Palestinian public could also perceive such a Fatah strategy as a U.S./Israeli-backed plot to undermine a popularly-supported Hamas government and lead to even greater public sympathy for Hamas. Barghouthi said that Hamas was already responding to this possible scenario by reaching out to the Europeans and Russians and Arab countries in an effort to stave off international isolation. Barghouthi argued that an alternative to isolating Hamas would be to strengthen the democratic opposition forces inside the PLC, but he admitted that such a strategy would take time to develop.

Barghouthi Surprised by  
Election Results  
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16. (C) Barghouthi said that final election results from the January 25 PLC elections were not reflective of the pre-election polling, which had suggested that "Independent Palestine" would receive between eight to 10 seats in the PLC (Note: It received two seats in the upcoming PLC, including the one for Barghouthi. End note.) He suggested that the discrepancy between the pre-election polling and the actual results stemmed from a severe polarization which occurred in the final days before the elections that pushed voters toward Fatah and Hamas at the expense of Barghouthi's party and Salam Fayyad's "Third Way". Barghouthi suggested that fewer people would have voted for Hamas if they had known the result would be so favorable to Hamas. (Comment: Barghouthi failed to mention the negative impact of independent Fatah candidates on the voting results in the district races. While Fatah won the popular vote in half of the 16 districts, in only three of the districts did Fatah win the most legislative seats, due to the dilution in voting strength caused by the high number of Fatah-affiliated candidates. End comment.) Barghouthi added that Hamas ran a superior campaign compared to Fatah and attributed the Hamas victory on Election Day to the failure of the peace process and the inability of Fatah to deliver to Palestinians.

WALLES